

**Focus On Student Learning - Instructional Strategies Series**

**Book One:**  
**50 Preassessment Strategies**

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## **Book One: 50 Preassessment Strategies**

By: Natalie Regier

### **Note to Teachers**

*Focus on Student Learning* is a series of teaching resources created to support teachers and save them time. Each booklet within the series takes one aspect of instruction and suggests multiple ways of using that instruction practice in the classroom. *Book One: 50 Preassessment Strategies* provides teachers with a wealth of strategies they can use to preassess the students in their classrooms.

### **Who is Natalie Regier?**

First and foremost, I am a teacher. I have spent over 20 years in the classroom and have worked as a regular classroom teacher, a special educator, a vice principal and a learning coordinator. I have always been interested in finding ways to help students succeed in school. My search for knowledge to increase student learning has taken me to places like Edmonton, Boston, Orlando, and Las Vegas where I attended conferences and talked with educators from all over the world. As teachers, we all have one thing in common. We are searching for ways to help our students succeed in this ever-changing world. Helping every student in our classroom achieve is a challenge. I am continually searching for ways to support teachers with this challenge.

I am also a writer. Over the years, I have written over 40 teaching resources for *Davies and Johnson* and *Rainbow Horizons*. I enjoy writing and especially enjoy writing for teachers. I know how hectic the life of a teacher is and that time is a precious commodity. I am now dedicating my time to searching for information and creating resources to support teachers in the classroom. There are many changes occurring in education and teachers need to keep up with new curriculums, research-based instructional practices, and ways to increase the achievement level of their students. The teaching resources I create support teachers in understanding and implementing the changes in our education systems.

To learn more about my teaching resources, workshops, coaching and consulting visit my website at: [www.regiereducationalresources.com](http://www.regiereducationalresources.com)

Let me know what type of resources I could offer that would support you in the classroom and save you time searching for ideas. Contact me at: [natalie@regiereducationalresources.com](mailto:natalie@regiereducationalresources.com)

### **How does assessment fit into instruction?**

Assessment and instruction go hand in hand in a classroom that focuses on the student. Teachers need to use a variety of different strategies to assess student readiness for a particular unit of study and to plan their instruction around the needs the students demonstrate. Ongoing assessment of student learning is an important part of the planning process.

There are three main types of assessment. They are preassessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment. This booklet focuses on strategies that teachers can use during the preassessment process.

	<b>Preassessment</b>	<b>Formative Assessment</b>	<b>Summative Assessment</b>
What is it?	Assessment that is used to collect information about students.	Assessment that gathers information about student learning.	Assessment that shows what students have learned.
When is it used?	Before a lesson or new unit of study.	During a lesson or unit of study.	At the end of a lesson or unit of study.
Why is it used?	To determine the readiness level of students and to inform instruction.	To track students' progress and to make changes to instruction.	To provide evidence of what students learned.

### **What is preassessment?**

Preassessment is used to collect information about students. Teachers want to discover what students know about a particular lesson or unit of study. Information can be collected through informal preassessments such as exit cards or anticipation guides or through formal preassessments such as pre-tests or rubrics. Through the use of preassessments, teachers can plan instruction that is at the readiness level of their students.

### **What are informal preassessments?**

Informal preassessments are used to determine what students know and they usually occur during instruction. They are quick to administer and give teachers immediate feedback. Students usually do not realize they are being assessed as informal preassessments occur naturally as part of the teaching process. The informal nature of these preassessments reduces the test anxiety of students who feel anxious during more formal assessment processes.

### **What are formal preassessments?**

Formal preassessments are used to determine the overall achievement level of students and to identify possible strengths and areas to develop. They are usually pencil and paper tests which make them easy to administer. Formal preassessments have standardized administration and scoring procedures. Answers are either correct or incorrect. Assessment results can be used to compare one student to another or one student to a standard or mastery level. It is important to note that the scores of preassessments should never be recorded but rather should only be used to gather information about students in order to plan instruction. The only time results of a

preassessment may be used as a point of comparison to show growth if the same assessment is given at a later date.

### **When are preassessments used?**

Preassessments are used at the beginning of a new lesson or unit. Teachers need to be clear on the outcomes of the lessons or units to ensure they are actually assessing the skills and concepts they want the students to achieve by the end of the lesson or unit. As preassessments are given at the start of a lesson or unit, they have the added benefit of activating the prior knowledge of students and getting them thinking about the topic.

### **Why are preassessment strategies used?**

Preassessment strategies are used to make decisions about present and future instruction. They may also be used to decide on the groupings of students for activities within a lesson unit. For example, at the start of a unit on natural resources, teachers may use an informal preassessment such as, thumbs up/thumbs down, to determine what students know about natural and man-made resources. Results will indicate whether students know the difference between these two types of resources. If students are knowledgeable about these resources, teachers can move on to the next goal or outcome. If students do not appear to know the difference between these two types of resources, teachers begin their instruction by planning opportunities for students to develop their understanding of both natural and man-made resources.

Teachers may choose to use a preassessment to determine the groupings of students for activities in math class. Students complete a pre-test on fractions to determine their readiness levels for learning the new math unit. Results on the preassessment indicate which concepts or skills need to be taught to the whole class and which can be taught to small groups. Small instructional groups are formed based on the pre-test results. It is important for teachers to discuss the purpose of the pre-test and assure students that they are not expecting mastery but rather a picture of how the students are doing and the type of learning opportunities they need.

Teachers can also use the results of a formal preassessment to further test students who appear to have mastered the material. Students knowing the answers on a pre-test or quiz may be given higher level questions to determine if they have mastered the goals or outcomes of the unit of study being assessed. In an article entitled, “Differentiation tips for teachers: Practical strategies for the classroom” on the Davidson Institute for Talent Development website, the authors suggest that students who master the preassessment be given the final assessment for the unit or be given the five hardest questions of the unit to determine whether or not the student needs to participate in that unit of study. Read the article at: [http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles\\_id\\_10331.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10331.aspx) for more information on this use of preassessment information.

### **How do I determine what type of preassessment to use?**

There are a number of factors to consider when using preassessment strategies. Teachers need to take into account the purpose (what knowledge or skill is being assessed) of the preassessment, the needs of the students (age, readiness levels, learning preferences, etc.), and their own teaching styles. Teachers need to use strategies that fit in with their teaching styles to get

maximum results from the preassessment. This does not mean that teachers should not try different preassessment strategies but rather that they should not rely on one type of preassessment. Teachers should use a variety of preassessments to accommodate the learning preferences of students.

## INFORMAL PREASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

**1: ABC Lists** - To find out what students know about a topic, have students create an ABC list. Students list the letters of the alphabet down the left side of a sheet of paper. Beside each letter, the students write words related to the topic that begin with that letter. When students have exhausted all their ideas, they hand in their lists. Look over the ABC lists the students created to get an idea of what the students know about a given topic. The individual lists help determine which students know a lot about the topic and which students need to build up their background knowledge about the topic.

**2: Anecdotal Records** - Anecdotal records are notes about student knowledge, skills, and behaviours and can be used as a preassessment strategy. For example, if you plan to create learning opportunities that focus on the conventions of writing, you can gather data in the days leading up to this unit of study by observing students using conventions in their writing and by studying pieces of writing that the students create. Make notes indicating what you observe and then use the notes to determine the conventions that need to be the focus of the learning opportunities you are planning.

**3: Anticipation Guides** - Anticipation guides are great tools for gathering information on what students know about a new unit of study. They have the added benefit of allowing students to self-assess their knowledge before a unit of study and then to re-assess their knowledge after the unit is completed. An anticipation guide is made up of three columns. In the first column are the students' responses before participating in a targeted unit of study. In the second column is a set of statements that the students can respond to and either agree or disagree. In the third column are the students' responses at the end of the unit of study. Let's imagine that a teacher is going to begin a unit of study on photosynthesis. In order to gather information on what the students know about photosynthesis, an anticipation guide, like the following, could be completed by the students.

Before		Photosynthesis	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		1. Plants give off carbon dioxide.		
		2. Plants use energy from the sun and convert it into food.		

Before		Photosynthesis	After	
		3. Photosynthesis needs three elements: light, water, and carbon dioxide.		
		Etc.		

Students put a check mark in either the “agree” column or the “disagree” column for each statement. The number of statements on an anticipation guide will vary but should fit on one page. The guides should be completed quickly and easily. Depending on the age and ability of the students, they can also be asked to write the correct answer if they “disagree” with the statement. In the above sample, a student may check “disagree” with the first statement. After checking “disagree” the student flips the page over and writes: “Plants give off oxygen.” By asking students to rewrite the incorrect statements, teachers are provided with additional information about what the students know, or don’t know, about photosynthesis. Anticipation guides can be used in any subject area.

A search for “anticipation guides” on Google will bring up a number of great resources. Two online resources you may want to explore are: Instructional Strategies Online that was put together by Saskatoon Public Schools and can be found at:

<http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/de/pd/instr/strats/anticiguide/index.htm>, and

All About Adolescent Literacy which is a website dedicated to providing online resources for students in Grades 4 to 12. There is a blank template for creating an anticipate guide on this website.

<http://www.adlit.org/strategies/19712/>

**4: Carousel Brainstorming** - Carousel brainstorming is a great way to get students out of their desks and moving. This strategy will appeal to students who need to get moving to do their best thinking. Set up a number of stations that include chart paper and markers. Each station should have a different word, statement, or question written on the top of the chart paper. Before beginning a unit on light, for example, print the words “natural sources of light,” “artificial sources of light,” “shadows,” “reflections,” “refractions,” “optical devices,” and “light energy” on individual sheets of chart paper. Students are then divided into seven groups. Each group is assigned to a station. One student is chosen to be the recorder. Students have two minutes to brainstorm what they know about the topic. After two minutes, the students move clockwise to the next station. Another student is chosen to be the recorder and once again the group brainstorms what they know about the topic. Students cannot repeat what is already on the paper and all answers are accepted. This process repeats until each group has visited each station. The responses from the various sessions can then be shared as a class.

Things to consider when using carousel brainstorming:

- Give each group of students a different coloured marker so you can monitor the responses from each group.

- At the end of the brainstorming sessions, have the students pick out one or two main ideas at their final station to share with the class.

Visit the STEM Resources website for more information about carousel brainstorming:  
[http://www.stemresources.com/lesson\\_builders/carousel-brainstorm](http://www.stemresources.com/lesson_builders/carousel-brainstorm)

5: **Checklists** - There are endless uses for checklists in the preassessment of students. Checklists can be used across grade levels and across subject areas. Once you determine the concept or skill you are going to focus on, create a checklist that matches that skill. In language arts you may be studying how to be a good listener. Create a checklist of listening skills specific to the grade you teach. Before formally beginning to teach good listening strategies, observe the students in your class. As you see students demonstrating these strategies, check off that strategy beside their name on the checklist. Study the list to determine the strategies that you need to formally work on as a class and the strategies that you need to work on with smaller group of students.

6: **Choral Response** - The use of choral response is a quick strategy to get a general idea of what students know about a topic. Ask the class a question and have them respond in unison. This strategy does not single out students and it allows you to gauge whether the majority of the students are responding or only a few of the students.

7: **Conferences** - Another preassessment strategy you could use to find out what students know about a topic is conferencing. Conferencing involves meeting with students individually and asking them questions that are targeted towards the upcoming unit of study.

8: **Demonstrations** - Asking students to demonstrate a skill or show their knowledge is another way of gathering preassessment information. Provide students with base ten blocks and have students create visually representations of numbers with the blocks to see if they understand place value. Encourage students to show you how to produce secondary colours using water paints. Have students show you how to use a microscope or a calculator. Before beginning a new unit, list the skills and concepts students need to achieve during that unit. Determine which skills and concepts students could demonstrate to you as a way for you to assess their knowledge and skill level.

9: **Discussions** - Having discussions with the entire class or with small groups of students can also yield preassessment information for teachers to use when planning instruction. Focus questions should be prepared ahead of time; but let students take the lead in the discussions to discover what they know about the upcoming unit of study.

10: **Drawings** - Ask students to create drawings related to a topic that students are learning. Provide students with a piece of paper, a sticky note, or an individual white board and have them draw what they know. Some students struggle to put into words what they can visually represent in pictures. Encourage students to share their drawings and verbally explain the reasoning behind the drawings as they relate to the topic.

**11: Email Questions** - Most, if not all, the students in your class are familiar with computers. If your school assigns all students an email address, email your students questions about a unit of study and have them response to you via email. The students' responses will provide valuable information regarding what they know about a topic.

**12: Entry/Exit Cards** - Many of you have probably heard of exit cards and using them at the end of class to capture what the students have learned in a particular class or during a particular unit. Exit cards or entry cards can also be used as a strategy for preassessment. Exit cards are completed at the end of class and students hand them in as they leave the room. Entry cards are a version of the exit card. Rather than completing the card before they leave class, students are each given a file card when they enter the classroom. The cards have a question or prompt written on them that the students answer.

Before beginning a new lesson, you may want to get a quick read of your students and what they know about a topic or concept they are going to study. For example, if you are going to teach how to reduce fractions, an entry card could be given to students with one or two questions about reducing fractions. A glance at these entry cards will tell you if the students already know how to reduce fractions. Similarly, if your class will be studying about alliteration, ask the students to write down the definition of alliteration and give an example on a scrap piece of paper and hand it in. A quick glance through these entry slips and you will be able to determine what the class knows about alliteration. If the majority of students know the definition of alliteration and can provide an example, you may only want to target your instruction to those students who need further exploration of alliteration.

**13: Fist of Five** - The fist of five is a quick exercise that can be used as a preassessment strategy. This is where students provide their personal responses to target questions. Ask students what they know about a particular concept or skill within a new unit of study. Students who know nothing about the topic hold up one finger. Students who believe they are knowledgeable about a topic hold up five fingers. If students only know a little bit about a topic they would hold up two or three fingers. Teachers are able to get an overall idea of what their students know about a topic by glancing around the room and seeing how many fingers their students are displaying.

**14: Four Corners** - Four corners is a strategy I have seen used successfully at all grade levels. Create four signs with the words "strongly agree," "agree," "strongly disagree," and "disagree." Post one sign in each corner of the room. Make a statement such as, "Children watch too much television" or "Cell phones should be allowed in school." Students then move to the corner of the room that matches their response. If they strongly agree, they move to the corner of the room that says, 'Strongly Agree'. If they disagree, they move to the corner that says, 'Disagree.' Once all the students are in one of the corners they discuss the statement and their feelings surrounding the statement. After a few minutes, one student from each group reports back to the whole class.

One way to use four corners as a preassessment strategy is provided on the Technology Coach website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/eusd.org/kjosephson/home/formative-assessment/four-corners>

**15: Graffiti Wall** - The graffiti wall provides a visual representation of what students know about a particular topic. Cover a section of a wall with white paper. On the paper, write the topic, a question or a statement. Before a new science unit you may write “Endangered Animals,” or “Why is the spotted owl endangered?” or “There are many reasons why animals are endangered,” at the top of the graffiti wall. Encourage students to write or draw something they know about this topic. Before beginning a unit on outer space, students could write or draw everything they know about space. Before beginning a unit on safety, the students could draw or write everything they know about different kinds of safety (bike safety, fire safety, farm safety, etc.) Decide if you want students to repeat what is already drawn or written or whether you want original ideas only. Your decision will depend on the age and readiness level of your students.

**16: Individual Whiteboards** - There are many different ways to preassess students using individual whiteboards. You can give students a math question and have them solve the problem on their whiteboards. As students are answering the question, circulate through the classroom and observe students and the strategies they are using to solve the math question. If students are going to be learning about molecules, ask students to draw and label the parts of an atom on their whiteboard.

Whiteboards can also replace response cards. Students can print their yes or no response on the whiteboard and hold it up for you to see. A quick look around the class will determine whether the students know the answer. The uses for individual whiteboards as a preassessment strategy are endless in any classroom setting.

**17: Inside-Outside Circle** - Divide your class into two equal groups. One group is the inside circle and one group is the outside circle. The inside and outside circles face one another. Give students a topic or question. Students on the inside circle tell students on the outside circle everything they know about the topic or question. After a set amount of time, say, “Switch.” The students switch roles and the students on the outside circle get to do the talking. When the time is up, say, “Rotate” and students on the outside circle move in front of the student on their right and the process repeats. As students rotate, circulate around the circle and listen to what students are saying.

**18: Journaling** - Journals are a great way to preassess students’ knowledge about a particular topic. Before starting a new unit of study, ask students to write down everything they know or have experienced regarding the topic. If the new unit of study focuses on space exploration, students may write about a trip they took to the Kennedy Space Center when on a holiday in Florida, or they may write about a show they watched like *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*, or they might write about facts they remember from reading a book about space. All journal entries will give you valuable information about your students and their knowledge of space.

**19: KWL Charts** - You may be familiar with the KWL chart. It is a chart with three columns. The first column is for what the students “know,” the second column is for what the students “want to know,” and the third column is for what the students have “learned.” When students complete the first column of the KWL chart, you get a good idea of the knowledge and

experiences students have about a given topic. I found it useful to use three sheets of chart paper for the KWL chart. As students brainstormed what they knew about a topic, I printed their responses on chart paper. I then hung up the “K” portion of the chart at the back of the room for students to refer to if needed. The students then brainstormed what they wanted to learn about a topic. I printed their responses on a second sheet of chart paper. I hung the “W” portion of the chart on one side of the classroom so students could add to the chart during the lesson. Depending on the age of the students, individual KWL charts could be used. Students fill out the “K” and “W” portions of the chart and then hand in the charts for you to look at.

**20: Matching Games** - Matching games can be used at any grade level and across subject areas. They work especially well when preassessing vocabulary words. Provide each student with a set of cards. Written on each card is a vocabulary word or a definition. The students match the vocabulary words to the definitions. Circulate throughout the room and make note of the words students are able to match easily and the words students are struggling to match. The words and the definitions can be reviewed after a set amount of time to allow students to correctly match the words to their definitions. Students can match rhyming words, similar parts of speech, math questions and their answers, etc. The possibilities for using this strategy are endless.

**21: Observations** - Planned observations can yield important information about student learning. Observing students as they work allows you to see what strategies students use to solve problems and how they perform targeted activities. You can either target specific students or make general observations of the whole class. Observations may be used as a preassessment strategy in a number of different situations. If students are struggling with a particular concept or are exhibiting distracting behaviours, you can observe those students and try to determine the factors that are hindering their success or influencing their behaviours.

**22: One Minute Essay** - Provide students with a question about your new unit of study. The questions should be targeted to your outcome(s) for that unit. Time the students for one minute. Students should be able to adequately answer the questions within the one minute time limit.

**23: One Sentence Summaries** - Provide students with a list of questions they can easily answer in one sentence. When used as a preassessment, the questions focus on the new unit of a study. Possible question starters can begin with who, what, when, where, why, and how.

**24: Open-Ended Questions** - Using open-ended questions with students allows you to ‘see’ your students’ thought processes. In math, you could provide students with a question related to a new topic of study. The question could be provided with the correct answer or with an incorrect answer. Students explain how their answer was arrived at and why the answer provided is either correct or incorrect. This type of question would yield many different responses as students explain their reasoning. In a content area, such as social studies, you could use an open-ended question to find out what students know about a topic. When studying colonization and why people settled in a particular area, provide students with a map depicting different land features (rivers, lakes, mountains, sand dunes, etc.). Ask students where the best place to form a new

settlement would be and to explain their reasoning for their choice. Reading or listening to their responses enables you to determine what your students know about colonization.

**25: Peer Interviews** - An interactive preassessment strategy is the peer interview. Provide students with two or three questions that relate to the topic being studied. Each student pairs up with another student and ‘interviews’ that student using the target questions. After the initial interview is completed, the students change roles and the interviewer becomes the interviewee. Students can ask the same questions or they can ask a different set of target questions. Circulate throughout the room during this process and listen to the responses of students. Choose a few students to report on what they found out during the peer interview process.

**26: Placemats** - The placemat activity works well as a preassessment strategy. Divide students into groups of four or five. Give each group a sheet of paper that is large enough to accommodate the size of the group. Divide the paper up so each student has an area to write in and there is room in the middle for their final answers. An 11” X 17” sheet of paper works well with four students. Provide students with the topic of study. Students individually brainstorm their ideas and print them in their section of the paper. When completed, the group discusses the brainstormed ideas and writes the three or four main ideas in the center of the page. Students must come to a consensus on their ideas before they are recorded. You can gain valuable information on what students know about a topic as you circulate around the classroom listening to discussions and by studying the placements.

**27: Questionnaires** - Create a series of questions or statements on a questionnaire and have students respond with a ‘1,’ ‘2,’ or ‘3.’ For example, to determine what the students know about daily health habits, construct a series of statements such as: ‘I know the importance of eating a healthy breakfast’ and ‘I understand why I shouldn’t watch more than two hours of television or play two hours of electronic games each day.’ Students print, or circle, a ‘1’ if they do not understand why this is a healthy habit, a ‘2’ if they believe it is a healthy habit but can’t explain why, and a ‘3’ if they know it is a healthy habit and can explain the benefits to their health.

**28: Questioning** - Asking questions is an excellent strategy that can be used for preassessment. Create a list of higher and lower level questions that focus on a unit of study. Begin asking students the lower level questions to determine if they have a basic knowledge of the unit. If students have this background knowledge, ask them higher level questions. Bloom’s Taxonomy is a great resource when using questioning with your students. Visit Uteach at: <http://u-teach.blogspot.ca/2007/08/question-starters.html> for question starters at the various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

**29: Quick Writes** - Quick writes involve writing whatever comes to mind in a short amount of time without stopping to make corrections. Provide a focus for a quick write by giving students a topic such as ‘how weather affects our daily lives’ or ‘why family is important’ or ‘ways to stop pollution.’ Students write for a set amount of time on the given topic and then hand in their compositions. A scan through the quick writes will give you an idea of the knowledge base

students are bringing to that topic of study. It is important to stress to students that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to write a quick write. Quick writes are not marked or graded in anyway. The purpose of using a quick write for preassessment is to determine what students know about a topic.

For an example of how a quick write is used in a middle school science unit, visit:  
<http://cse.edc.org/products/assessment/middleschool/quick.asp>

**30: Response Cards** - There are many different types of response cards that can be used to get quick feedback from your students. Response cards are a great way to involve all the students in your class and give you a general overview of what they know.

The most common type of response card is probably the yes/no cards. Students are given two file cards. On one file card they write the word, "Yes" and on the other file card they write the word, "No." Students respond to your questions by holding up their responses. They hold up the word 'yes' if that is their answer and the 'no' card if their answer is 'no.' In a primary classroom, the yes/no cards may be used to determine if students understand a particular phoneme or phonics rule. For example, if students are asked if the word 'yellow' has a long 'o' sound, they hold up the 'yes' card if they agree and the 'no' card if they disagree. Individual students could then be called upon to explain their 'yes' or 'no' answer. In the older grades, call out questions about a topic of study, such as electricity, and ask students to use their yes/no response cards to answer. You might ask, "Did Benjamin Franklin discover electricity?" or "Does electricity find the easiest path to the ground?" Students could then be called upon to defend their answer.

Another type of response cards includes the math operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Students are given four file cards. On each file card would be one of the math operations. Read a problem to the students. Students hold up the file card that matches the operation of the problem.

Other suggestions for response cards include:

- Cards with the vowels a, e, i, o, and u. Call out a word and students hold up the card that contains the vowel that they hear in that word.
- Cards with various punctuation marks such as the comma, the period, the question mark, the explanation mark, the colon, the semi-colon, etc. The punctuation marks would depend on the grade level and ability of the students in your classroom. Hold up sentence strips that are missing the punctuation marks. Read the sentences aloud to the students. Students hold up the cards with the appropriate punctuation mark.
- Cards using the words "true" and "false" or the words "agree" and "disagree." These response cards would be used in a similar fashion to the "yes" and "no" cards described above.

For further information on response cards, please read the article entitled, "Differentiated Instruction Activities Don't Have to be Time Consuming" that is found on the Unarchived Articles website at:

[http://articles.webraydian.com/article22347-Differentiated\\_Instruction\\_Activities\\_Dont\\_Have\\_to\\_be\\_Time\\_Consuming.html](http://articles.webraydian.com/article22347-Differentiated_Instruction_Activities_Dont_Have_to_be_Time_Consuming.html)

**31: Running Records** - A running record is a strategy that can be used to determine the types of miscues a student is making when reading. Running records can easily be used as a preassessment strategy. Analyzing a student's miscues taken during a running record provides information about the strategies this student is using to decode words when he or she is reading. Once you determine the strategies students are using, students can be introduced to other strategies that will help increase their accuracy reading rate. For further information about running records, please visit:

<http://www.readinga-z.com/guided/runrecord.html/>

**32: Self-Assessments** - Before beginning a unit of study, give students a self-assessment to complete regarding their knowledge and/or skills that are a part of that unit. If your unit involves volcanoes, ask students to evaluate their knowledge of terminology related to volcanoes, causes of volcanoes, places where active volcanoes exist today, etc.

**33: Sentence Prompts** - To preassess what students know about a particular topic or unit of study, provide them with a sentence prompt and have them continue writing using the prompt. If beginning a unit on recycling, provide students with one or more of the following sentence prompts: "It is important to recycle because .....", "Obstacles to recycling include .....", "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about recycling because .....", etc. The sentence prompts provide students with a starting point for their writing.

**34: Sticky Notes** - Students love to use sticky notes. Give each student three or four sticky notes and have them write down their ideas about a topic in a set amount of time--say five minutes. They are to write each idea on its own sticky note. If students need additional sticky notes, have them in a place that is easy for students to access. At the five minute mark, have students share their ideas with a partner. After the initial sharing, have students group any common sticky notes they may have and arrange the sticky notes into categories. Give students five or six minutes for this activity. Circulate throughout the class as they are completing the activity and listen to the facts the students came up with and how they are grouping them into categories. When time is up, have one group of students join another group of students. Encourage the students to share their categories and the reasons why they grouped their sticky notes into those particular categories. After reviewing the categories from both groups, encourage students to come up with common categories using all the responses. This process can then be repeated once again by having one group of four students join another group of four students. Inform the students that they will be sharing their categories with the rest of the class. This sticky note activity will give you an overall idea of what knowledge your students have about a particular topic or unit of study.

**35: Super Sleuth** - The super sleuth activity is fun for students and is a great activity when you need to get your students up and moving. Students are given a sheet of paper with a grid of questions. When used as a preassessment, the questions will be related to the new unit of study. Students rotate around the room and find people to answer their questions. Let students who are answering the questions choose the question they would like to answer. Once a student responds

to one of the questions, that student puts their initials in the corresponding square. A student can only answer and initial one square per super sleuth activity grid. The number of squares will depend on the age of the student. Set a time limit for this activity. The amount of time will depend on the number of squares. Students should aim to get the most squares initialed that they can. Circulate throughout the class listening to and observing students. At the end of the time limit, join back as a whole group and discuss the questions. Responses to the questions will give you an idea of the knowledge students have about the topic.

Sample of Grade 1 Super Sleuth Activity on Friendship:

How do you know if someone is a good friend?	Why do we need friends?
What do you do to be a friend?	What do you like about your best friend?

Sample of Grade 6 Super Sleuth Activity on Electricity:

What is electricity?	What would a world be like without electricity?	Name three things that run on electricity in your home.
What types of materials make good conductors?	What is static electricity?	What materials make good insulators?

**36: Think-Pair-Share** - Think-pair-share is an excellent strategy to find out what your students know about a topic. Provide students with a topic to think about--perhaps inventions. Give students a few minutes to think about the topic and/or jot down ideas or make simple illustrations about the topic. The students then share their ideas with a partner. I have observed in classrooms where the teacher sets up think-pair-share partners at the beginning of the week, every time she uses the strategy during the week, she can tell her students to find their “sharing partners.” By establishing the partners at the beginning of the week, she saves time. She rotates the partners so that students will have the opportunity to work with all the other students in the class. Once the partners have exchanged their ideas, a few students can be called upon to share their ideas with

the class. While students are working with their partners, circulate through the class listening to the students.

For a more detailed look at the think-pair-share strategy visit TeacherVision at:  
<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/group-work/cooperative-learning/48547.html>

**37: Ten Minute Writing Samples** - An easy way to discover what students know about writing is to collect ten minute writing samples. Ten minute writing samples provide a wealth of information about the writing ability of individual students. For younger students, teachers are able to tell at a glance the amount students are able to write in a short period of time, the quality of the students' writing, what conventions (capitalization, punctuation, etc.) the students use, and how their sentences develop their topic. For older students, teachers can look at sentence fluency, the organization of the writing, the use of conventions, and the choice of words the students use. I typically collected a ten minute writing sample on the first day of school when I taught grade one. I would print a topic on the board and tell students to write on that topic or they could come up with a topic on their own. Students would start writing when I said, "Begin" and put their pencils down after I said, "Stop." I often let students finish the sentence they were writing before handing in their writing sample. Some students do not like to hand in work they consider to be incomplete.

Collecting ten minute writing samples on a regular basis (weekly, monthly, or once each term) allows students and teachers to see writing growth. Students can analyze the writing samples to determine what goals they want to set for their writing and you can analyze the writing samples to determine what writing skills or concepts to focus on during their instruction. I found that collecting ten minute writing samples, on a monthly basis, provided my students with a visual progression of their growth as writers. They studied the writing samples and determined what growth they had made and an area of writing they wanted to focus their attention when writing new stories.

**38: Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down** - I have used this preassessment strategy with all ages of students. It can be used as a preassessment strategy as well as to check on student understanding. When used as a preassessment strategy, teachers ask students something specific with regard to what they know about a topic or they give a statement and students respond with a 'thumbs up' if they agree or a 'thumbs down' if they disagree. A third option could be provided by having students respond with a thumb pointing to the side. During a unit on nutrition, a teacher could ask students if they have heard of the Canada Food Guide or My Plate in the United States. Students could respond with a 'thumbs up' for yes and a 'thumbs down' for no. The teacher could then ask how much they know about the Food Guide or My Plate. If students know a lot about the Food Guide they would give a 'thumbs up,' if they know something about it they would give a sideways thumb, and if they knew nothing about the Food Guide (other than its name) they would give a 'thumbs down.' Thumbs up, thumbs down can be used everyday in almost any situation that requires a quick assessment of your students.

**39: Three Facts and a Fib** - Students enjoy the three facts and a fib activity. This exercise involves students writing three facts about a topic or unit of study and then writing one fib. They

mix the fib in with the facts and read them out to the other students. The students identify which of the statements is a fib. The three facts and a fib strategy can also be used to preassess the knowledge base about an upcoming unit of study. You can ask students to write three facts and a fib about ecosystems. Students hand their statements in when they are complete. Read through the statements to get an idea of what the students know about ecosystems.

40: **3, 2, 1** - Used for preassessment, the 3, 2, 1 strategy may involve having students write three things they know about insects, two things they want to learn more about them, and one personal connection to insects. The responses to the 3, 2, 1 not only provide you with assessment information regarding what the students know about a topic but they also provide information about what the students want to learn about a topic.

41: **Turn and Talk** - A quick way to get students talking about a new topic or unit of study and to get a general idea about what students know about a topic is the turn and talk. Explain to the students that they will be studying about nutrition. Students turn towards a neighbour. Ask one student in each pair to put up their hand. This student is the talker. The other student is the listener. Talkers have one or two minutes, depending on the age of the students, to talk to their neighbour about the given topic. When the minute is up, the other student talks about the same topic and tries not to repeat anything the first person talked about during their time. As students are participating in the turn and talk, circulate around the room listening to responses. At the end of the turn and talk, have a few groups share what they discussed. Ask the larger group if they have anything new to add that the sharing groups did not bring up.

Things to consider when using the turn and talk:

- Each week, establish new turn and talk partners to be used for all turn and talk activities during that week. By establishing turn and talk partners for the week, time is saved as students know their partners and are ready for the assigned topic.
- After the initial turn and talk, have one set of turn and talk partners join another set of partners and share the information.
- After one partner speaks, the other partner summarizes what was said. This encourages students to be active listeners.
- Model this process a number of times until all students understand the process.
- Discuss what it looks like to be the ‘talker’ and what it looks like to be the ‘listener.’

42: **Traffic Light** - The traffic light is a quick preassessment strategy and is similar to the fist of five or yes/no response card strategy. Provide each student with a red circle, a yellow circle, and a green circle. Ask students questions about what they know regarding a new unit of study. Students who know nothing about the topic hold up the red circle. Students who know some things about the topic hold up the yellow circle. Students who know a lot about the topic hold up the green circle. Teachers are able to get an overall idea of what their students know about a topic by looking around the room and making note of the colours the students are holding up.

43: **Webs** - Webs are useful graphic organizers for preassessing students. Students can develop a class web or they can be given individual webs. Students can also create their own web. Have

students print the target word in the middle of the page. They draw lines from the target word and print or draw what they know about the target word. If students were beginning a unit on flight, they would print the word 'flight' in the middle of the page. The students would then draw lines from the word 'flight' and write or draw everything they know about flight. If using individual webs, have students share their webs with a partner and then report back two or three key points to the rest of the class. A variety of web graphic organizers can be found at:

<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

## **FORMAL PREASSESSMENT STRATEGIES**

**44: Cloze Activities** - Creating cloze activities for students to complete is a formal preassessment strategy. Write a summary paragraph or two about a new unit of study. Leave the first and last sentences intact. In the remaining sentences, take out key terminology and replace those words with a blank. Do not include too many blanks in the sentence or students will lose the meaning of the sentence. Give each student a copy of the cloze activity and have them fill in the blanks in the paragraphs. Depending on the age and ability level of your students, you may want to provide students with a word bank of terminology they can access to help them complete the cloze activity. A review of the cloze activities will provide you with information regarding the students' knowledge about the upcoming topic or unit of study. A traditional cloze activity could also be created. In a traditional cloze, every fifth or seventh word is removed and a blank is put in its place. Programs are available online to help you with this process. One site that will create a cloze passage for you is edHelper. Simply paste your paragraph into the program. Visit edHelper at:

<http://edhelper.com/cloze.htm>

**45: Commercial Assessments** - There are a number of commercial assessments that can be used to preassess students. If you use Accelerated Reader, Reading A to Z, or a similar program at your school, there are a number of assessments built into the programs that you can use as preassessments to determine what your students know. Remember, in preassessment, it is not the "score" that is important but the information about student readiness levels that you can use to plan your instruction.

**46: Computer Surveys** - Another preassessment strategy for the computer savvy is a computer survey. Create a number of questions that cover the breadth and depth of the topic being studied. Make these into multiple-choice, true/false, or one answer questions. Type these questions into a platform such as Survey Monkey. Students then access the survey on their computers. The great thing about using a platform such as Survey Monkey is that the results are all summarized for you and you can look at each question and see what percentage of students answered each question correctly. There is a free version of Survey Monkey available at:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com>

**47: One Minute Fluency** - Fluency is an important skill for understanding what you read. You can quickly preassess your students' fluency using a grade level passage. The passage can be

obtained from a story or novel that is written at the appropriate grade level. Ensure that the passage is longer than the most fluent reader in the class can read in one minute. Once you have an appropriate passage, individually time your students to see how many words they can read in a minute. Students who struggle with fluency can be given targeted instruction to increase their skill. Recording students as they read the one minute fluency passage provides you with a sample of the students' oral reading. An analysis of the errors made by the student allows you to provide targeted instruction regarding word attack strategies.

There are a number of websites that have grade-level fluency passages that can be used for a one minute fluency assessment. Grade 1 to Grade 6 fluency passages are available at The McGraw-Hills Company website:

<http://treasures.macmillanmh.com/california/teachers/building-reading-and-writing-skills/student-fluency-passages>

and Grade 2 to Grade 12 fluency passages at the Meade School District website:

<http://www.meade.k12.sd.us/search.html?q=fluency%20passages>.

If you have a subscription to Reading A-Z, there are a number of fluency passages located at that website as well.

**48: Pre-Tests or Quizzes** - A pre-test or quiz is a series of questions related to a unit or lesson. Teachers can give the test they intend to give as a final test or a portion of a final test as a pre-test to determine what students know. Questions on a pre-test can be short answer, multiple choice, true/false, etc. Answers are standard and are easily marked as correct or incorrect. Pre-tests are not used as a “mark” but rather are used to determine the readiness levels of students, the prerequisite skills that need to be taught, and what to plan to fill any gaps that exist in student learning.

**49: Rubrics** - Rubrics can be used to preassess students. Before beginning a unit of study, students place themselves on the rubric. The information provided by the rubrics assist you when planning instruction for the unit. Use the rubrics to look for strengths and areas of need and to help determine which students may need individualized or small group targeted instruction. Rubistar is a website that helps teachers create rubrics and is found at:

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org>

**50: Spelling Inventories** - There are a number of spelling inventories available to assess students on their level of spelling and the spelling patterns they have mastered. These spelling assessments can be used to preassess the levels of students and determine which spelling patterns you want to focus on with students. Spelling inventories can be given at regular intervals - monthly or each term to see how students are progressing. They are not “tests” that students study for but rather they assess how students are doing with their daily spelling and provide a starting point to plan instruction.

One of my favourite spelling inventories is the Schonell Spelling Assessment. Google “Schonell Spelling Test” to access documents and pdf files that include the spelling words, dictation sentences, and a template for the students to record their responses. I used this spelling assessment as a quick preassessment when students entered my classroom at the start of a new

school year. I also administered the Schonell at the beginning of each month to see how students were progressing with their daily spelling. I would analyze the spelling miscues of students to see what word patterns I needed to focus the students' attention on and build into my other language arts activities.

Another spelling inventory is the Edmonton Spelling Scale. This spelling scale has six forms so teachers can alternate the forms they use with their students. The Edmonton Spelling Scale is available at:

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/65437237/Edmonton-Spelling-Test>

Other booklets available in the *Focus on Student Learning* series are:

***Book Two: 60 Formative Assessment Strategies***

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